

# South american way of building a grand prix car: Hector Suppici Sedes' 1927 Lincoln race car

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**Abstract**— This article wants to review the historical and technical data surrounding the 1927 Lincoln driven by Uruguayan Hector Suppici Sedes in the first Grand Prix of Rio de Janeiro, which took place in 1933 at the famous circuit of Gávea. This car, probably the oldest still active in historical races, is a representative of adapted cars for racing, a trademark of the South American motorsports.

**Index Terms**— Automotive history, Grand Prix, Motorsports, South America.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Following the example of Europe and its grand prix racing in 1930, South America encounters a sporting passion in motorsport. However, despite having talented pilots and mechanics, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay had no national car manufacturers.

Thus, cars made in Europe and the United States, usually sports cars, were adapted to serve as race cars. One of the most curious examples of these cars is a 1927 Lincoln.

Made in the United States, the car was driven by a famous Uruguayan, who found fame in Argentine motor racing, in a maiden race in Brazil. In addition to these achievements, currently this vehicle is probably the oldest car adapted activity in historic races.

The investigation of the technical and historical literature of this car is a small window in the understanding of this historical moment in motorsport in South America and also a starting point in scientific research in this field.

## II. SOUTH AMERICAN CAR RACING

As said in previous research about South American Grand Prix [1] [2], Before there was Formula One, there was the Grand Prix. And when comes the Grand Prix, he is born old. After all, the first Grand Prix win that name was the French one, in 1906, held in Le Mans. It had the curious official name of ninth Grand Prix of the Automobile Club de France.

It happens that the French newspapers and the ACF itself wanted to invent a tradition, "an outlet fiction simply the childish desire to establish the Grand Prix of them as the oldest race in the world" [3]. So the first "Grand Prix" became the 1895 Paris-Bordeaux-Paris race, which in fact was a pioneer, but difficult to demarcate as the first, racecar-stylish Grand Prix.

In those beginnings, French and English, with their Gordon Bennett Cup, struggled to decide who had the best cars and drivers. The great irony is that in the first Grand Prix, in fact,

in history, the 1906 one, had a Hungarian winner, Ferenc Szisz with a French car, a Renault. Szisz was mechanic French factory, whose owner, Louis Renault, gave up running after the death of his brother Marcel in 1903 Paris-Madrid race.

The American continent was represented in this pioneering race by the ninth placed Elliott Shepard, from United States. In that race, there was mixed categories as the current formula, rally and endurance. It was the chance to motorsport to show that it had the potential to be globalized.

South America was not behind. In Brazil, in 1908, Count Lesdain, along with newly created Automotivo São Paulo Club (under the presidency of Antonio Prado Junior), create the first race in the country, held at the "Circuit Itapeperica" between São Paulo neighborhood Parque Antarctica to the downtown area of the city of Itapeperica da Serra. The winner was Count Sylvio Alvares Penteado with a Fiat [4]. In Argentina, the first race was even before the first Grand Prix: in Palermo, Buenos Aires, in 1901 [5].

Thus, it was only a matter of time for the South Americans enter the official circuit of Grand Prix, called at the time of "Great Épreuves", ie the major challenges. Initially composed of the French GP, the Italian GP at Monza was added in 1921, with the revitalization of racing post-World War I. In 1923, thinking about the creation of a world championship (which would be created officially in 1925), the Indianapolis 500 have been added to this circuit.

Thus, in the same 1923, South America began its participation with the Argentine Raúl Riganti and Martin de Alzaga running for the Indianapolis 500 in May (with a team of Argentine inscription who also had the Spanish Pierre De Vizcaya, all running with Bugatti cars) and even Alzaga disputing the Italian GP in September with an American car, Miller.

Currently, we can not define the first South American participation in races in Europe, neither what was the first victory in races (though the usual convention is that out Martin Alzaga, with an English car Sunbeam at Autodrome Cup 1924 held in the French Miramas). The maximum is that in the case of the World Championship of Great Épreuves, the first South American victory never happened (except during the races of World War II, where the World Tour Grand Prix is delimited to Brazil and Argentina, but without receiving Great name Épreuves). Only in 1950, with the Argentine Juan Manuel Fangio's victory in the Monaco Grand Prix, the first championship of Formula 1, the successful and well-known South American saga began within the major challenges of Grand Prix.

However, without the South Americans first, as Riganti, Alzaga, Teffé, Landi, Correa Campos, we would never have Fangio, Fittipaldi, Reutemann, Salazar, Piquet, Senna and many others who staked the victorious tradition of South America in largest category of world motorsport. But this is a

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story not told in books, buried only in the newspapers of the time and memory gradually fades over time. One name that seems to fade away is Uruguayan Hector Suppici Sedes.

### III. HECTOR SUPPICI SEDES

Born in Uruguay on March 15, 1903, Hector Suppici Sedes has two greatest achievements in the history of motorsport. The first is to have been the only foreign driver to win a race in the competitive Argentine touring car championship (Turismo Carretera): the GP del Sur in 1938.

The second is that he was a great custom inventor for racing cars: "He [Suppici Sedes] also provide knowledge and was the man who contributed to the better preparation of machines for modern grand prix. His "inventions" were celebrated: the double damping per wheel, reinforcements of the chassis, little water tubes for wipers, rugs with crossbars to place under the wheels; and a pipe to drain water to ensure consistency in the car's metal roof and several more interesting details to enumerate. All of these opportunities were provided generously to all drivers because he hid nothing. To all, Hector Suppici Sedes was always in a plainness and a meridian clarity." [6]

Hector Suppici Headquarters dies in an accident in the second stage of the 1948 South America GP on December 4, 1948.

### IV. BUILDING A LINCOLN RACER

In 2004, appears on the Internet, photos of a 1927 sky blue Lincoln car that seems to have been adapted for the Grand Prix races of the season. The owner claimed that the car had been Hector Suppici Sedes [7].

The initial shock to the community of car collectors is that there were no records in Lincoln's owners about this car. However, the historical documentation about South American motorsports indicated the car authenticity.

First factor is the fact that to build custom cars for racing is a common habit in South American grand prix circuit before the 1950s. The very Suppici Sedes has a documented example of this, his 1937 Ford V8 winning car in 1938:

"In the year 1937, for the first time nearly all the pilots used "ordinary" or custom bodied cars, the most used was a Ford 5 window coupe, with closed steel bodies. Old fashion were the "handmade" bodies, like the Lincoln. Hector Suppici Sedes won the Gran Premio of 1938, that was the first Speed Race run in Argentina with custom bodied cars. For the first time now it was obligatory to use closed steel bodies for everyone. The winner - Hector - drove a 1937 Ford 5 window coupe and no changes in the motor were found, except for this: a) He changed the ordinary air filter for the carburetor for a special one. b) He reinforced the water cooling system by the addition of an extra water tank, 40 litres, fixed in the place where the back seat was. With a pump, the co-pilot could send fresh water to the radiator when the temperature has high and water evaporated. This pump could also take hot water from the radiator and send it to the backseat tank to get cooled. With this, an adequate temperature of the coling water was achieved, resulting in beter functioning of the engine. c) The engine oil capacity was increased from 4 to 8 litres, by adding an extra reservoir under the dashboard. With this the carter had the correct amount of oil. d) He put Bosch buttons to turn on the lights, everyone independant, you could turn on just one light at a time if you wished. e) The chassis was reinforced and Houdaille shock-absorbers were fitted. f) and

strange but real in advance, he put a drilled pipe accross the windscreen through which water would flush down cleaning the screen when mud got stuck in it. It is written here that from this car's "windscreen-washer" custom ones took the idea" [7].

The second factor is the historical record. According to historical references [8] [9], Hector Suppici Sedes ran with a Lincoln adapted while racing car in the first Grand Prix of Rio de Janeiro 1933. The Uruguayan was one of five foreigners (the other four were the Argentine Raul Riganti, Augusto McCarthy, Ernesto Blanco and Vittorio Coppoli) present in sixteen contestants in this inaugural race at the legendary circuit of Gávea.

These are the only data that sources say for sure. There are elements of participation of Hector Suppici Sedes that are still shrouded in doubt. In Uruguay, they claim that Lincoln was given to Suppici Sedes in Brazil exclusively for this race [10]. Thus, the car was never his property and would not have his mark as inventor of race car customizations.

So, in this point of view, the Lincoln racer was one of the ten adapted cars that competed in the race. By adapted car, it is understood the sports car was customized to be a race car. About the number of unique sports cars and unique race cars, there are discrepancies.

We know that the winner, the Brazilian Manuel de Teffé, ran with a sports car: the Alfa Romeo 6C 1750. For photos, we know that the third place, the Italian-Brazilian Nino Crespi, ran with a race car: the Bugatti T37A. There is record of 3 more Bugattis, but we do not know whether they are sports or race cars. We only know for sure that they are not adapted [8] [9].

In addition to Lincoln, among the adapted cars, there are 1931 Ford which came in second with Primo Fioresi and an adapted Chrysler, which came in fourth with the best placed foreign driver Augusto McCarthy. The very final position of Suppici Sedes in the race are alternating between the sixth and seventh places depending on the record.

Within the context, what are the changes made to transform Lincoln into a race car? According to certain historical record [8], the engine was completely replaced. The curious thing is that it was put an even heavier engine in Lincoln. Instead of the original factory one, the 357.8CID V8 with 357.8 ci, Suppici Sedes' car had a nondenominational engine with 448 ci. Probably thinking of the engines of the time, the 1927 car received the V12 engine from the 1933 Lincoln Phaeton K-series. In addition, the entire upper part of the car was cut. Thus, the roof of the Lincoln Suppici Sedes does not exist.

If at first glance it did not apperar, but the adapted cars were competitive on the race cars indeed. An example of this was the Primo Fioresi's Ford. It received the nickname Mossoró, which was the horse's name that won the I Grand Prix Brazil (horse derby) two months before the race [9]. Mossoró, the horse, came to be considered an underdog in the derby because it was not a horse created in mild climates (England or Argentina), but in the heat of Pernambuco hinterland.

Thus, as the horse, the adapted car was seen as a South American way to overcome the tradition in the sport. If you later confirmed as a car made by Brazilians Lincoln Suppici Sedes would be a car of the same lineage. Major field of research in order to understand these cars still arise as necessary.

## V. NOWADAYS

After the announcement via Internet the existence of Lincoln and the fact be on sale, the car was purchased by Brazilian Nelson Piquet, three times champion of Formula 1. Currently the car has the same Uruguayan color which Suppici Sedes (sky blue) ran in 1933 and runs in historic races such as that which is annually held in the Brazilian city of Franca [11]. In popular culture of Brazilian auto racing, the 1927 Lincoln is what is called "calhambeque" [jalopy], the old car that looks useless to the eyes of the present, but is revealed as a technological jewel. It is a link between the traditional "calhambeques" and called "baratinhas" [cockroaches], by which the previous race cars to the 1950s are known in Brazil. Probably the 1927 Lincoln race car is the car adapted to grand prix oldest currently in activity.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This first study on an adapted car for racing created in motorsport in South America of the 1930s provides us sharing a legacy often overlooked in sports. If today, the racing is a sport where the money invested is a crucial factor, the past shows us that creativity and ingenuity of pilots and mechanics were founding in motorsport.

The great tradition of motor racing, which takes up more than one hundred years in South America, was built through these cars. Notably, the beginning of Juan Manuel Fangio's career, the first South American champion in Formula 1, it was with an adapted car to race in his hometown of Balcarce in Argentina.

The search for these cars, either through scientific research or through the automotive restoration promoted by collectors, it is crucial to maintain a framework of history and memories of this sport. So much more than praise and promote new automotive technologies, research on motorsport engineering need to look at the past and for its preservation and understanding.

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